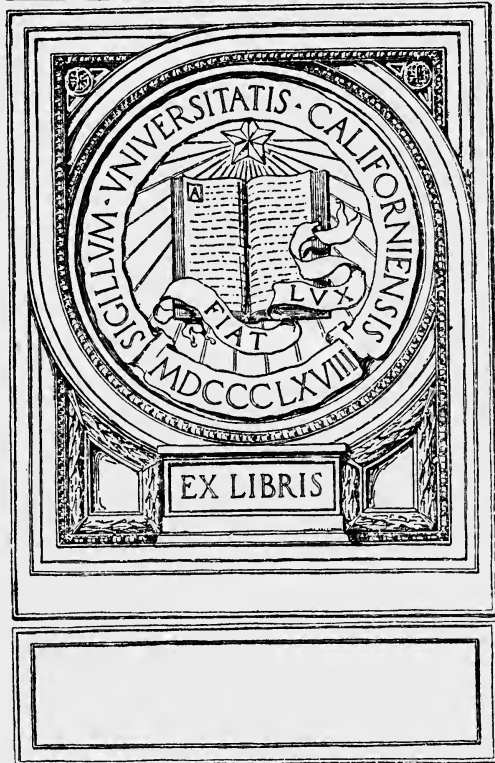


EXCHANGE



SOME EARLY
BUFFALO CHARACTERS

By FRANK M. HOLLISTER

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

SOME EARLY BUFFALO CHARACTERS

By FRANK M. HOLLISTER

Of a few persons and things standing out in my own recollections of Buffalo in the "fifties" I may speak here. If I were master of the pictorial art I could paint a picture of "Crazy John," for example, that every one recalling him and his piteous story would instantly recognize. A tall, lean man of thirty years, perhaps, with the pathetically wistful look in his eyes of one half-conscious of a hopeless quest for lost wits, John was a familiar and welcome visitor in most of the kitchens in my neighborhood. It was understood that he had lost his reason either through disappointed love or from over-study. The accomplishments he was in the habit of displaying as a return for food and warmth were limited to dancing and saying his prayers. He made few complaints, the only one I recall being that his father shaved him with the scissors, a process he found no pleasure in. "All the ladies love me," he would say. "Do you love me? Give me two cents." I can see his poor gaunt figure at the street corner now, his eyes peering furtively up and down, this way and that. Then he would start off at a rapid pace—nowhere, as if a happy thought had struck him or a call had come for him. It will probably be hard to make those who never knew "Crazy John" realize how large a place this gentle and forlorn creature fills in the memories of some of us. Boys are often thoughtless to the point of

cruelty to animals and the mentally defective; but I cannot remember any one teasing or tormenting "Crazy John."

OLD SCOTT.

Another quaint character that those who lived in Buffalo fifty or sixty years ago recall with a smile was "old Scott," the one-legged colored town crier, galloping about on a kind of an animated rocking horse and offering rewards for the restoration of lost children. His appearance, foretold by a bell which he swung with great vigor, and his proclamations, created almost as much excitement as the booming of the fire-bells and the desperate anxiety of Red Jacket 6 to get to the scene of conflagration before Live Oak 2. Really to appreciate the importance of this figure of old Buffalo, one should have been a small child in the forties, with a keen memory of the dreadful sound of the crier's bell, which smote one's ear while running home, hours behind time, followed by the loud cry: "Oh, Yes! I have lost a little Yankee boy five years old. He had on a blue jacket on, and gray pants on, and some shoes on his feet, and who ever puts me on the track of that little Yankee boy will be well rewarded."

EARLY DELAWARE AVENUE.

It must have been in Scott's day, in "the forties," that historic times really dawned on my own personal consciousness with the narrow escape I had from being killed by an enraged sow on the sidewalk on Delaware avenue near Mohawk street. In those days swine and cattle were allowed to roam for forage in the streets of this as of other American cities, greatly to the surprise and disgust of Mrs. Trollope, Charles Dickens and other fastidious travellers. Misconstruing my attempt to pet one of her progeny the animal charged with fury and bowled me over, and I have

always understood that I was only saved from the ignominious fate of being reduced to sausage meat, then and there, by the timely interposition of a chance passer-by. Strangely enough, this gruesome incident, vividly stamped on my memory, has never impaired in the slightest degree my life-long fondness for pigs, more especially, I should say, in the sublimated form of spare-ribs, bacon and sausages.

“WATER JOHN.”

I do not personally remember a certain “Water John,” who may be properly recalled here, as a sort of companion-piece to Scott, the town-crier. Mr. Samuel M. Welch, in his breezy “Recollections of Buffalo Fifty Years Since,” published in 1891, while writing of the town’s primitive method of obtaining spring water from the Jubilee Water Works, near Gates Circle, through hollow logs, notes, as a curious coincidence, looking out of his window and seeing workmen disinterring from a trench in front of Sherman S. Jewett’s residence some of those same primitive wooden conduits. He goes on to remark that another water-supply supplemented the Jubilee logs in early times, namely, that furnished by John Kutcheson, who filled a hogshead with lake water and drove it on wheels about town, selling it to regular customers. He was a jolly happy-go-lucky Alsatian and one of the town characters. His depot, a frame and plaster shack on the southwest corner of Franklin and Court streets, survived until 1910. Mr. Kutcheson siphoned water into his peripatetic reservoir at the foot of Erie street and sold it at the rate of a shilling (twelve and a half cents) a barrel.

THE LAKE CAPTAINS.

I have often thought it a pity that some one with Mark Twain’s memory, gifts of literary expression and intimate

acquaintance with his subject, could not have commemorated the skill, daring and resourcefulness of our early lake navigators, as Mr. Clemens has happily preserved the marvellous story of piloting on the Mississippi, in the halcyon days of steamboat traffic on that mighty stream. If Captain Dorr, or Captain Dobbins, had possessed the literary knack, or if the late L. G. Sellstedt, who had the knack, had caught the inspiration and had gathered material available forty years ago but lost forever now, we might have had a longer list of old-time characters to draw from than is within my ken today. The lake captains of the period between 1820 and 1850 were a peculiarly hardy, bold and clever race of navigators. To command a lake passenger steamer was then a far more difficult and dangerous duty than to command a vessel on the ocean. During the greater part of this period the lakes were not adequately charted, lights were few and harbors unprotected. The lake captains sailed by eye and ear and they had their work cut out for them by about as hazardous conditions as could have been found on any large body of water in the world. Without doubt there were "characters" among these brave and capable mariners of whom we should like to know more than their names, which is about all the information that has come down to us concerning them. Mr. Welch pays handsome tribute to them as a class and has recorded many names, some of which I remember well as of heroes I have seen or heard celebrated in local tradition.

Of these I may mention Captain Bob Wagstaff of the Northern Indiana, and Captain A. D. Perkins of her equally famous consort, the Southern Michigan. Buffalo boys used to go down to the foot of Main street to feast admiring eyes upon these splendid vessels. Then there was Captain Morris Hazard of the Empire State, and as for the City of

Buffalo, the latest and peerless flower of the old side-wheel floating palaces, no Buffalo boy who lived in "the fifties" will ever abandon in this world the conviction that she was the handsomest ship that ever floated. Of course, we understand that the great *Imperator*, the latest triumph of megalomania in marine architecture, is bigger, but "the lines" of the City of Buffalo were much finer. The Waldorf-Astoria is bigger than the Albright Art Gallery, but—well, you see how it is.

Among the retired lake captains who resided in Buffalo some few may recall Wormwood, commonly known as Deacon Wormwood, who became a pillar of the Methodist Church on Niagara street, where the Masonic Temple now stands. The Deacon was a Christian of the stern, unbending type and in his store, near the wharf, where he sold sailors' outfits, he often had occasion to vindicate his religious principles. His customers when sober respected his scruples, but one day a drunken fellow became abusive and blasphemed horribly. Deacon Wormwood, marching up to the offender with fire in his eye, cried, "Drop that, you rascal; another word and I'll backslide for five minutes and give you the damndest hiding you ever had in your life."

Before leaving the ancient mariners I might make a passing allusion to a certain Fred Emmons, mentioned by several chroniclers of small beer as "a famous humorist" and practical joker in the middle decades of the century. Emmons was a steamboat runner, or agent, whose taste in jokes was shown in scaring a party of idlers in Stevenson's livery office nearly out of their senses by declaring that he was tired of life and putting what looked like a keg of gunpowder into a blazing fire. A less drastic jest was that he played at the expense of a farmer whom he induced to drive a load upon a platform in front of the churches where the

town sundial was located and wait patiently for the official weigher, under the belief that it was a hay-scale. As for Mr. Emmons's humor, it appears to have had but one dimension—breadth only. It would have to be described, I fear, as of the kind that distinguished the literature which Mr. Wegg thought could not be read aloud in the presence of Mrs. Boffin. And there were other humorists of the early days, anecdotes of whom are likewise debarred from rehearsal in my discreet paper by the application of this same wholesome test.

JOSEPH ELLICOTT.

Among the most notable characters among our own townspeople in the first two decades of the last century, must be reckoned Joseph Ellicott, in whose imagination, before men lived on the spot, the city of Buffalo was pictured in a future more brilliant than it has yet realized. In 1800, when he was forty years old, Joseph Ellicott, who had surveyed the great Holland Purchase for Dutch capitalists, became the agent of the Holland Land Company and served in that capacity for twenty years. His policy, in dealing with settlers in the townships under his charge, was lenient and far-sighted, in one sense. He advised purchasers to pay in part only and to keep a reserve for improvements on the land. This liberal arrangement might have worked out better for the interests of his principals had not the war of 1812 and a period of bankruptcy intervened. The actual result was disastrous. During these twenty years Joseph Ellicott was the great man in Western New York—literally “monarch of all he surveyed”; and it is to be said to his credit that vast power neither corrupted him nor made him arrogant. He did not exert his influence in politics, but did lend it freely to the building up of the community—to the

cause of education and of religion; to the building of the Erie Canal. It is a pity that his plan for erecting a mansion on the "Ellicott Square," which originally included the lots between Eagle and Swan streets and from Main running back to Michigan street, was abandoned, owing to the parochial narrowness and obstinacy of the town officers. He meant to develop a fine park there and to bequeath it to the city to be used for a public resort. Another of his large projects not carried out was the construction of a great inner harbor between the Terrace and the lake. Ellicott was the seer, the prophet of Greater Buffalo. It was after the Erie Canal was completed that one of the early boomers wrote: "Buffalo has no rival—it can have none. Cities west of us may arise to wealth and importance, but they will be our tributaries; . . . thus rendering Buffalo what it may ever claim to be—the Great National Exchange." The loose screw in this reasoning, as in Joseph Ellicott's prophecies, was failure to anticipate the effect on Buffalo of the opening-up of the West by railroads. That was a factor no one could anticipate.

THE FOUNDER OF BUFFALO.

One man looms pre-eminent among the early Buffalonians—Samuel Wilkeson. He is called "the Father," or "Founder" of the city. On his monument in Forest Lawn are placed the words

"URBEM CONDIDIT"—"HE BUILT THE CITY."

What this tribute means is that to him more than to any other man is due the credit of inducing the state authorities to make Buffalo the terminus of the Erie Canal and of opening Buffalo river as a harbor for lake vessels. The story of the harbor-building is a familiar one and shows Judge Wilkeson's strong characteristics to great advantage.

He was of Scotch-Irish stock—which some people think the finest strain in our American blend. President Woodrow Wilson, when president of Princeton, said at a Harvard Commencement: “I am one of those who are of the seed of that indomitable blood, planted in so many parts of the United States, which makes good fighting stuff—the Scotch-Irish. The beauty about a Scotch-Irishman is that he not only thinks he is right, but knows he is right.” Samuel Wilkeson had the fighting-stuff in him—he came by it honestly. Six Wilkesons were killed at the siege of Derry. John, the father of Samuel, fought throughout the Revolutionary War. Eight of his grandsons fought to save the Union—“all on the shooting line.” And Samuel, too, “knew he was right.” That was why he beat General Porter and Black Rock on the canal proposition and forced the building at Buffalo of the steamboat *Superior*, which succeeded the wrecked *Walk-in-the-Water*, first steamboat on Lake Erie. He was not always right but he was always in earnest and usually had his way. He was, in short, a born leader and the acknowledged head-man in Buffalo in the quarter of a century following the close of the War of 1812. He had three sons, William, John and Samuel, who were also men of force and intellectual power, and who worthily maintained the reputation of the family. The homestead, built by Judge Wilkeson in 1825, still stands on Niagara Square, a dignified monument in a way, to its builder who “built the city.” If it becomes any community to rear monuments in honor of its founders, Buffalo ought thus to commemorate the masterful and public spirited Samuel Wilkeson. Is it not strange that there should be in this city a public memorial of Red Jacket, the Seneca chief, but none of Samuel Wilkeson, its founder and chief citizen? “This man,” wrote his son Samuel, “was a king among men. Men

obeyed him without loss of self-respect. He moved masses of men and did not excite jealousy. His scorn of what was dishonorable or mean was grand. His courage was chivalric and complete. And way down in the lion heart of the man was a soft nest in which his children were held and his friends found warmth and sympathy." In the comparatively short and simple annals of our city we shall find no finer type of all 'round manhood than Samuel Wilkeson.

A DARING EXPLOIT.

In connection with Wilkeson and his memorable achievement in making a harbor at this port, I must mention here the most recklessly daring feat ever performed on this frontier. N. K. Olmstead and James Sloan were two assistants of the Judge in the harbor work whom he praised highly in his writings. Wilkeson writes: "N. K. Olmstead was a man of unusual muscular power. The severe labor he performed on harbor work, perhaps no man in the country could equal. He lived in Buffalo when the village was burned by the British, and his home and property were destroyed. When peace was declared he declined to be a party to the contract, remaining alert to make reprisal while on the river. Managing to obtain a load of (British) military supplies to transport from Chippewa to Fort Erie, which included two kegs of specie, he landed on the American shore and hid the money. He then left the frontier, but returned to Buffalo in 1819. When on harbor work he at times went to the Canada shore for boat-loads of stone, and on such an occasion was arrested and placed in a boat to be taken to Chippewa. The boat had a small skiff in tow, in which was a single paddle. When nearing Chippewa he leaped into the skiff, cut its fastening, and took to the rapid current, where his captors declined his pursuit. By extra-

ordinary exertion he landed on Grass Island. Observing a boat putting out from Chippewa, he again braved the rapids and managed to make Porter's mill-race. A less active and powerful man would have been swept over the falls. The next day he resumed harbor work."

COLONEL "LANCE" PALMER.

It takes all sorts to make a world, even so small a world as our Buffalo was when it first became a city, in 1832. This community in the thirties was as gay a town for its size as there was in the land. It was full of characters. Take Colonel Alanson Palmer, for example. From all that I have read of "Lance" Palmer, I imagine him to have been a gaudy combination of Mr. Micawber, Colonel Sellers and "Old Billy" Lee. Like Mr. Micawber he was affable and generous to a fault, "not only with his own money," says Mr. Welch, who knew him, "but with that of other people." Like Colonel Sellers, he was a born speculator, overflowing with grand schemes that rarely came to anything. And like "Old Billy" Lee, of whom Lowell tells, he was a magnificent spendthrift. Billy Lee's idea of a competence was "a million a minute and expenses paid." Colonel Palmer could have taken the starch even out of Rockefeller's fortune. He was a very handsome man and in his prosperous days famous for his fashionable raiment and brilliant equipages. The pin on his ruffled shirt front, a portrait of Andrew Jackson, set in diamonds, was the envy of all the lesser swells of the period. Well, Colonel Palmer flourished like the grass and was soon cut down, of course. There was a rank growth of that sort in Buffalo during the boom times in the thirties, most of which vanished when the light went out, with the gas, in the panic of '37. Colonel Palmer left a more substantial monument than some of the high-flyers, however, in the original grand American Hotel, which he

built, and which, we are told, had "some features only to be found in certain royal palaces in Europe." He also built one of the only two full-rigged ships that ever sailed the lakes. This vessel was named for his wife, the *Julia Palmer*. Very characteristically she carried every sail ever mentioned in the history of navigation. She was elegantly finished in mahogany and shining brass. Mr. Welch says that Monte Cristo's yacht was a hooker to the *Julia Palmer*. Unfortunately she didn't pay and was later converted into a mere steamboat. The Colonel was never converted. Yet his intentions were of the best. There were no public schools then and Colonel Palmer, seeing the need, established the Palmer School with a handsome endowment for sixty pupils. In two or three years the securities of which the endowment consisted became worthless and the school collapsed.

The Colonel was certainly a character. He scorned small transactions. Once over a cold bottle he said to a companion: "I'll give you \$150,000 for everything you own, except your wife and babies and household effects." "Done," says the other and the bargain was consummated. The Colonel took lands, houses, mortgages, notes; paid part in cash and gave a mortgage to secure the rest. Guy H. Salisbury in his interesting paper on the "Speculative Craze of 1836"¹ alludes to this incident and in close context writes: "Day before yesterday (his paper was written in 1863), I met that wholesale purchaser on his way to the Poorhouse with a certificate from the Overseer in his hand." In 1836 Alanson Palmer was almost a millionaire and the most dashing figure in Buffalo society. Thirty years later his burial was a public charge. In him it may be said, is to be seen the personification, in its most engaging and yet pitiful form, of the "Buffalo boom" of 1836-7.

1. See Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, vol. IV, pp. 317-337.

THREE LAWYERS.

Of the old-time members of the bar, perhaps no one is better entitled to honorable mention in the category of "Early Buffalo Characters" than Roswell L. Burrows. Mr. Burrows was commonly called Judge Burrows, after he had served for a time as County Judge. He looked like an old-fashioned country lawyer. In dress, speech and manner he was extremely unconventional, but he is remembered by the veterans of the bar as one of the masters of the science of law in this community. He was said to be so much more interested in the legal aspects of his cases than in the mere winning of a verdict that he seemed to be acting as counsel for both sides, sometimes to the dismay of his own client. He could not help looking at the case on all sides and his careful weighing of arguments and balancing of the merits of a disputation tended to aggravate "the law's delays." He had a dry, caustic wit in which his contemporaries delighted. One day a friend informed him that his partner, David F. Day, who was even more deliberate in action than himself, had discovered a new species of snail in one of his excursions in the suburbs. "Hm!" grunted Burrows, with a twinkle in his eye; "David must have met it!" To another friend who asked for the address of a notary public, Burrows said: "A notary public! Why, lift a plank anywhere and a dozen will scabble away."

As a complete antithesis to R. L. Burrows, John Ganson may be mentioned. He was a handsome, well-groomed, aristocratic looking man of courtly manners and rare ability. He was brilliant and yet thorough. He had the artist's joy in perfection of professional work and there was pleasure as well as profit for other lawyers in seeing him try a case. When a Member of Congress, during the Civil War, Mr. Ganson once called upon the President and said:

"Mr. President, can it be true as reported that you intend to issue an Emancipation Proclamation in the near future?"

Mr. Lincoln looked the elegant thoroughbred all over, rather quizzically, and then laying a big hand on his inquisitor's shoulder quite irrelevantly observed:

"Why, Ganson, how close you shave!"

As one historic example of Lincoln's various happy ways of maintaining discreet reserve on important questions, or of bringing too protracted interviews to a close, this anecdote, though familiar to many, will bear repetition here. John Ganson was a notable personage in whatever circle he moved, and the impression he made on his contemporaries was deep and lasting. The late Sherman S. Rogers, who survived his friend many years, often mentioned to his intimates the fact that the most constantly recurrent figure in his dreams was John Ganson.

In his day a certain nondescript lawyer named Josiah Cook, universally known as "Joe" Cook, was one of the town "characters." How he ever broke into the legal profession was veiled with the same mystery that surrounded his escape from the clutches of the Vigilance Committee in San Francisco in 1849. Perhaps the late Police Justice Thomas King, himself a member of that committee, could have dispelled some of the mystery had he been interrogated. But it matters little now. "Joe" Cook was a criminal lawyer in a rather broad sense of the word. To the lake transportation companies he was a terror, by reason of his pernicious activities as attorney for deckhands and roustabouts who had disputes about wages with the vessel owners. On a three or seven dollar claim he would libel and hold up a steamer whose time was worth big money. His success on these lines grew into a kind of blackmail that resulted in Mr. Cook's accepting a regular "retainer" from

every large transportation interest in Buffalo. He had an office and lodgings in the old Spaulding's Exchange on the Terrace. It was doubtless in his flush days that he bought the famous sealskin overcoat that made him a marked figure in the streets and saloons of the city for many winters. He kept no books and squandered his income in gambling and riotous living. He died in his squalid rooms on the Terrace, a forlorn and pitiable object. But his last months were brightened by the charity of a lawyer friend of this city who had known him in his prosperous days and could "make allowances."

R. W. HASKINS.

In looking for "characters" among the old-time Buffalonians we naturally search for men different from their contemporaries, distinguished by exceptional qualities and temperaments, by eccentricities and so on. In this class I cannot fail to notice Roswell W. Haskins, one of the most interesting personalities of his day and generation. Our respect, and even admiration for the man is heightened by the fact that his childhood was unhappy and that he had no advantages in the way of education and training other than those obtained in the hard school of adversity. He came to Buffalo in 1822, after a few years spent in New York and Canandaigua; acquired a modest competence at journalism, book-binding and book-selling and retired from business in 1832 at the age of 36 to devote his time to scientific studies and the public welfare. He mastered the French language that he might read the reports of the French Academy of Science. He was chairman of the meeting at which the Young Men's Association was organized and was one of the earliest friends and supporters of the Society of Natural Sciences. He cared nothing for money, but was always thinking and planning in a large way for the develop-

ment of natural forces for the general good. Mr. Sellstedt, in his excellent paper on Mr. Haskins in the Historical Society Publications,¹ tells how he argued for the utilization of natural gas and of electricity for lighting purposes; how he proposed the use of iron columns in buildings and urged a continuous line of railroad from Albany to Buffalo, ten years before it became a reality. In all these manifestations of a vigorous and original mind he was simply a generation or two ahead of his time. Most people could not understand him and he resented their lack of appreciation. Naturally such a man could not accept the geology of the Old Testament and as his dissent was bluntly expressed, many persons thought him a "dangerous" character.

Doubtless the community generally regarded him as "queer," while he thought his upright life and disinterested labors deserved at least the good opinion of his fellows. Thus in later years he became isolated and embittered. But back in 1830, when the cholera ravaged the town, no other man so gave himself and all his time and strength to nursing the friendless and alleviating the misery of the awful situation as did R. W. Haskins. A miserable vagabond when stricken with the plague was left alone in a deserted tenement. Haskins sought him out, carried him in his arms to a wagon and put him in the hospital. He and Loring Pierce, the undertaker, were the heroes of this terrible episode. If R. W. Haskins did not believe that the whale swallowed Jonah, and was not sound on the natural science in Genesis, nevertheless, he was the best Christian of them all when the time came that tried men's souls.

PIERCE, THE UNDERTAKER.

Speaking of Loring Pierce, in connection with Mr. Haskins, there was a character who certainly deserves hon-

1. See vol. IV, pp. 257-284.

orable rank among the rough diamonds of older Buffalo. He survived in my own day and I remember him well. A big, burly man, brusque in manner and of a bluntness of speech that would jar the teeth out of modern sensibilities. These qualities imparted to his ministrations a certain humor that was certainly incongruous, but is, I confess, the chief characteristic of the man that abides in my memory. His loudly whispered summons to a fellow-pallbearer of mine on one occasion: "You boy with a mouth big enough to eat pudd'n' with a shovel," put a terrible nervous strain on all of us. And who that has heard Mr. Pierce's laconic order to the bearers: "Fetch her," when the moment for action had come, will ever forget it! Mr. Pierce's heart was tender if his speech and manners were rough. He meant to pay a compliment when he assured a lady that she would "make a lovely corpse." One cannot imagine our modern funeral directors, to whom a decorous and sympathetic sobriety of demeanor has become a second nature, guilty of seeming brutalities like these.

But Loring Pierce was a character and a privileged one. He was sexton, undertaker and general utility man in mortuary matters. His humor, in one sense, was in harmony with his business. It was deadly. Alas! poor Yorick! It is related that he was himself in mortal fear of death. However this may have been in his later days, in his prime he never flinched when he had to walk hand in hand with the Enemy, day and night, for months together. In 1832, when pestilence held the town in its grip, Lewis F. Allen, with Haskins and Dyre Tillinghast, was a member of the Board of Health. In his account of this invasion of cholera in Buffalo, he tells how he went to bed alone in his house, on Main street, one night, in the midst of a violent thunderstorm. About midnight he was startled by a tap at the

window and upon investigation found Pierce outside. In reply to an anxious inquiry as to what had happened, Pierce said:

"Well, Mr. Allen, I've got six coffins in my wagon and am going up to the graveyard to bury them; and not knowing but you would like to take a look at the bodies and see that all was right, thought I'd call and ask you."

"And is that all?" asked the astonished Allen. "In such a storm as this, you call me out of bed to see six coffins on the way to burial. You are surely not alone."

"Oh, no! I've got Black Tony with me—he's watching the wagon now in the street. I guess we two can bury 'em and get home before morning. Good night, Mr. Allen."

The next morning Pierce was at his post at the Board of Health office, sedate as usual, as if he had slept all night. Mr. Allen's tribute is brief but significant. "Pierce was a hero."

AN HUMBLE HEROINE.

There were heroines, as well as heroes, too, in those days. When the chief nurse at the improvised hospital died suddenly, it was difficult to fill the unenviable position. In the emergency Pierce found a healthy Irish girl of twenty who volunteered to take the place. She did fine work but in four days Pierce buried her, too, sadly and tenderly. She was known only as "Bridget." And there was another—one Lydia Harper, a woman of the town, thirty years of age, whose appearance and carriage belied her occupation. When there was sore need of attendants for the sick this woman offered her services, without pay, and proved a ministering angel. She nursed the sick most efficiently and tenderly in the best and worst houses in the city throughout the cholera season. When the crisis passed she went back to her vocation and so into oblivion. But somewhere, we may be sure,

there are books kept where brave and devoted service, like that of "Bridget" and of Lydia Harper, is duly credited.

LE GRAND MARVIN.

All Buffalonians who have known Le Grand Marvin will concede that he was entitled to the distinction of being the queerest character that ever made this city his home. He was born Nov. 9, 1807, in Clinton Valley, New York, "hale then," he records in his will, "and uniformly so 'til in 1880, July 24th to 27th, on rush of blood to my left eye-socket." "My incline from a child," he continues in this same unique instrument, "to investigate causes, etc., and to do right, withheld me from seeking claimed (but really pseudo) benefits in any 'ring,' in or out of religious or political partyism, or other bigotry, or secret societies, yet aggressive everywhere, 'for the right of the masses' (even though unaided) thereby some selfish, bad, or evil persons (some vicious lawyers, judges, ministers, etc.) tried to advance their selfish, untruthful purposes by perversions and untruths, as to me and my doings; as pre-threatened, in substance, to 'crush' me in newspapers and elsewhere and by unjust suits, inequitable and willfully erroneous opinions, with inequitable decisions unjustly to harm me." The mental attitude toward society, and individuals with whom he came in contact, disclosed in this characteristic passage would doubtless have enabled Professor William James to reconstruct a Le Grand Marvin much as Agassiz would correctly classify and describe a whole fish from a single bone. This man was a born come-outer. He was not a gregarious animal. He distrusted and condemned all churches, political parties and professions. He found women full of guile and men wicked conspirators against his property and his peace of mind. His memory is per-

petuated, in the city where he lived sixty years, by his own skeleton, handsomely mounted, in the rooms of the Medical College, to which he bequeathed it, and by a bundle of papers and pamphlets in the Public Library containing a minute history of his interminable quarrels and litigation with his wife, brother and other relatives. A search among Mr. Marvin's literary remains reveals only two papers not litigious in character. Even in his famous will he fights his battles over again in 37 printed pages. The first of the two non-polemical documents was his diary, written in his youth before he had acquired the fearful and wonderful style that marks his maturer composition. The other is a lecture on "The Benefits of Rum," written in 1829. The title, the reader will find, is to be taken ironically. In robust sarcasm the author depicts the joys and glories of the habitual drinking of intoxicating liquors. It was a great industry in Buffalo in 1829; six thousand gallons were then drunk yearly. Mr. Marvin figured the toppers would drink up the town and consume their own bodies in a hundred years. "What a sublime thought it must be," he says, "to drink down not only whole farms and swallow houses, but to gullup (*sic*) down one's own arms and bodies—in comparison with which Jonah's whale is but a small fish." The writer then tells of a woman eighty years old, addicted to strong drink for many years, who went off in spontaneous combustion one day, and he says he could mention several cases in which a moderate drinker's breath has caught fire from coming in contact with a candle!

TRAGEDY OF THE BLACK CAT.

Le Grand Marvin's eccentricities of speech and conduct constituted one of the joys of life in Buffalo forty and fifty years ago. It is safe to assume that few older residents in

this community, addicted to the habit of keeping "scrap books," have failed to preserve choice examples of his unconventional style. From one of the golden treasuries of local memorabilia there comes a contribution that deserves "honorable mention," at least, in this category. The correspondence may be said to explain itself:

LE GRAND MARVIN,
LAW OFFICE.

BUFFALO, April 20th, 1876, 7 A. M.

MR. THOMAS FARNHAM,
At 637 Main St.

This morning in my rear yard just by the garden gate—I perceive a black dead cat; said by my family to be one of your two cats, yesterday P. M. in our back yard by the cherry tree—amusing themselves, when our kind neighbor, Mr. L. C. Woodruff's, powerful dog leaped over the partition fence between Mr. W. & my yard wholly uncalled, & unprovoked & prior unnoticed—ruthlessly attacked the cats, —one of which escaped up the cherry tree,—while he greatly injured the other cat before he could be driven off,—& NOW that injured cat after having sympathy & care & seeming restoration in part last evening—is the dead cat. So much is due to you as neighbor—& to Mr. W., who of course, would not approve the ruthlessness—& of course—you will dispose of the dead cat as you deem meet;—only PLEASE have it so disposed of THIS MORNING; or suggest if any misapprehension (above) of supposed facts—

Resp yr frd

LE GRAND MARVIN.

LAW OFFICE, NO. 639 MAIN ST.
BUFFALO, May 22, 1876, 10 P. M.

MR. THOMAS FARNHAM,
At 637 Main St.

Last week,—by a kindly intimation of a successful merchant—was first known to me—a “local” item in the *Buffalo Courier* of 26 April (last), headed “Black Cat.” Then about leaving town—I finally returned late this week & now have said ITEM—quoting parts of my PRIVATE “neighbor” letter of 20 April (last) to you,—

That “item” seems a MALICIOUS, what? & suggests queries—. To wit;

1. Could that “item” have started without said “private” letter had been furnished, by THEE?—of course, not.

2. Art THOU IN a Civilized Community?

3. Is such item MEET for a Civilized Community?

4. Art THOU an elder, or deacon in the 1st Pres. Ch. in Buffalo? So reputed.

5. Is that “item” the standard of “love” or “morals” in that church even in its “session”?

6. What is “meet” to be done under the Circumstances?—

Here is a PAUSE FOR A REPLY.

Resp— & a friend to you all,—in what is right.

LE GRAND MARVIN.

As for the three famous “exposes” of the deceits and machinations of the enemies of Le Grand Marvin, let those who care for the curiosities of literature consult the documentary and printed evidence in the grotesque and pitiful collection in the Buffalo Library.¹

1. In the library of the Historical Society, besides Mr. Marvin's singular pamphlets, are also preserved his will (typewritten) and five manuscript diaries, with his own entries and memoranda through several years; also two folio volumes, with his own records of cases at court, 1873-1884.

HEROIC TREATMENT.

How can I fail at least to mention that heroic old practitioner of the early days, Dr. Cyrenius Chapin? Dr. Chapin practiced by ear and the rule of thumbscrew. Let me note one prescription which was recently in the possession of the late Barton Atkins. It is in the shape of a bill for services rendered the famous Red Jacket:

ERASTUS GRANGER, *Esq.*,

DR.

To CYRENIUS CHAPIN.

For medical attention and for medicine delivered to Red Jacket, Nov. 5th, 1806.

To emetics.

Croton oil pills.

Sol. Tartar emetic.

Spice and opium plaster.

Pills of Croton Oil.

Item second.

19th call.

Cathartic.

Sol. of Glauber's Salts.

Emetic of Powdered Epecac.

Pills of Croton Oil.

Total £1, 17s. 0 d.

Received Payment, Buffalo Creek,

CYRENIUS CHAPIN.

"Some of the doses thus prescribed have been known to kill a horse," comments Mr. Atkins, "but Red Jacket survived the treatment twenty-four years."

CLINTON AND SALISBURY.

And then there was that most interesting and lovable of men, George W. Clinton, lawyer, judge, naturalist—a delightful character! He was not like other men but wherein he differed he excelled in all ways that go to make up a gentle, strong and winning personality. I remember the old man, but know him best by tradition and the tributes of friends. There were in this man qualities, tastes and a fellowship with nature that made him kindred with Walton, White of Selborne and our own Thoreau—different from each with much in common with all. If R. W. Haskins was the father of the Society of Natural Sciences, Judge Clinton was its constant patron and sympathetic supporter.

I may also note another attractive character of the middle decades of the last century—Guy H. Salisbury. “In his happy moments,” wrote one who knew him well, “as he was a few years ago, we seldom conversed with him without the suggested recollection of what literary tradition relates of Lamb. It was the suggestion of a likeness in exquisite simplicity of nature, in womanly delicacy of feeling and thought—in a certain quaint tone of being which is very rare.” Salisbury, like others of his name, was connected with the press of Buffalo and engaged in other pursuits, but these do not concern us. His personality is a fragrant remembrance.

OTHER NOTABLE MEN.

There were other notable characters in the professions in Buffalo's early day—George P. Barker, John Talcott and Albert H. Tracy, in the law; Dr. George W. Hosmer, whose thirty years' pastorate here was a power among the influences that made for civic and personal righteousness; Dr. William Shelton, the stout churchman, famed for brusque speech and big heart; and Dr. John C. Lord of the

Central Presbyterian Church, whose good wife's amiable eccentricities made her a more talked about, if not a more prominent figure, in local society, than was her distinguished husband. I would like to recall to the memory of some of you the McArthurs, who kept the famous candy shop. Mrs. Poole, whose "Reminiscences" were lately published,¹ and all of us, agree that there are no sweets in these degenerate days "like mother used to make" and the sedate McArthurs used to sell.

Our city of Buffalo, a very mushroom of a city in comparison with many others, being younger, reckoning from its burning in 1813, than men now living, has nevertheless been prolific in "characters" coming within the purview of my subject. It is truly a little world, full of interest to the student, and especially to the lover of human nature.

" Whatever moulds of various brain,
E'er shaped the world to weal or woe,
Whatever empires wax and wane,
To him who hath not eyes in vain
His village Microcosm can show."

1. See Publications, Buffalo Historical Society, vol. VIII, pp. 439-493.

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS
WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN
THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY
WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH
DAY AND TO \$1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY
OVERDUE.

MAR 30 1934	
MAR 30 1936	MAR 2 1978
FEB 19 1945	REC'D G. W. DEPT. FEB 27
4 Apr '53 LD	REC. CIR. JAN 13 '84
	JAN 20 1994
APR 2 1953	RECEIVED
26 Apr 57 BK	FEB 27 1995
REC'D LD	CIRCULATION DEPT.
APR 26 1957	JUL 31 1997
LIBRARY USE	AUG 8 1998
MAY 4 1957	
REC'D LD	CIRCULATION DEPT.
MAY 4 1957	
	LD 21-100m-7,'33

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



CO42456295

328463

F129

B8B85

v.17

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

